

From English lessons to UPSC tips, there's no subject these screen gurus can't tackle. Ahead of Teacher's Day, **Sunday Times** profiles India's new favourite faculty who are making classes fun and free

ANGREZI FOR THE AAM AADMI

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When Aakash Kadam was in school in Mumbai, English grammar was Greek to him. "I used to 'by-heart' it," chuckles the entrepreneur who's now relearning his participles and tenses at age 35. And it's his own YouTube tutorials teaching him. Kadam is the founder of Let's Talk that teaches people to speak English like they were born to it. Writing's not the tough part these days with technology-assisted spelling and grammar checks, acknowledges Kadam; it's speech that holds people back. And people for whom English is a second language keenly feel the need to communicate confidently and coherently with colleagues and customers in the global workplace. That's where Kadam comes in. His free YouTube tutorials for the spoken-English-aspirant include everything, from knowing when to use the aux-

LET'S TALK

Founder:
Aakash Kadam | 35

Subscribers: **12 lakh**

Channel views: **10.7 crore**

No. of videos: **900**

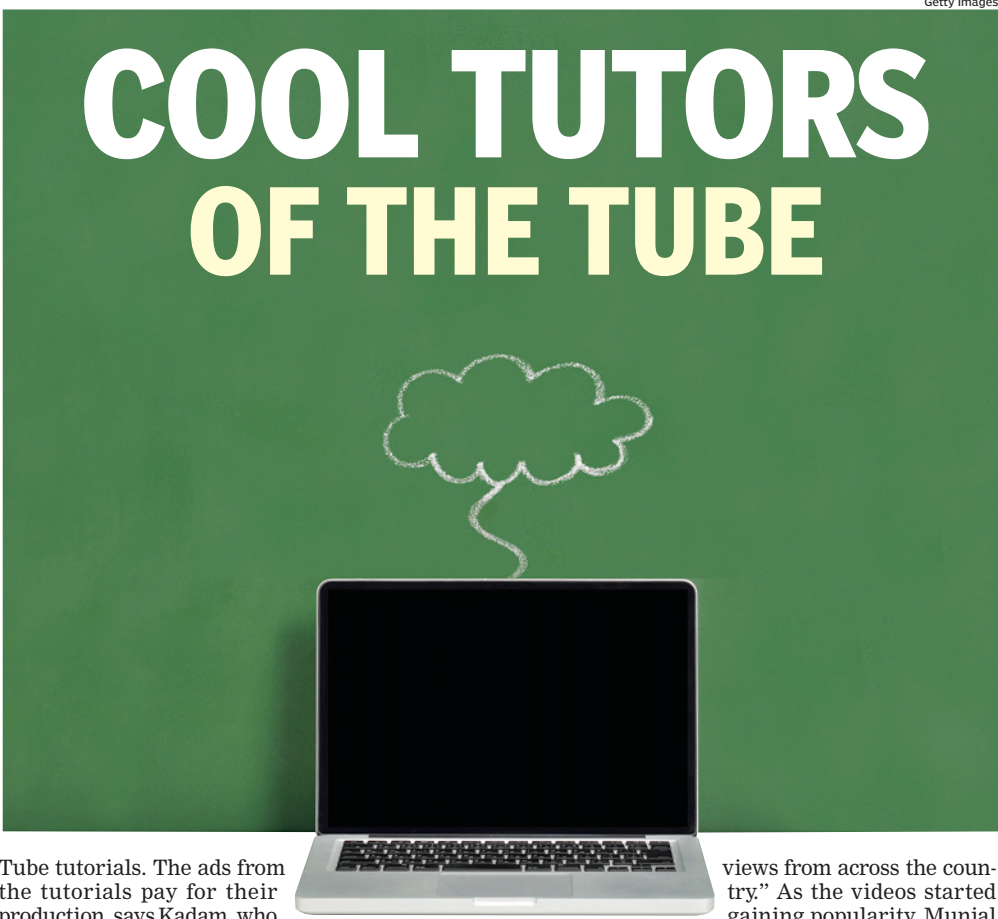
What Works

> The tutors are spirited, and engaging and contextualize lessons in real-life scenarios. They don't resort to chalk talk

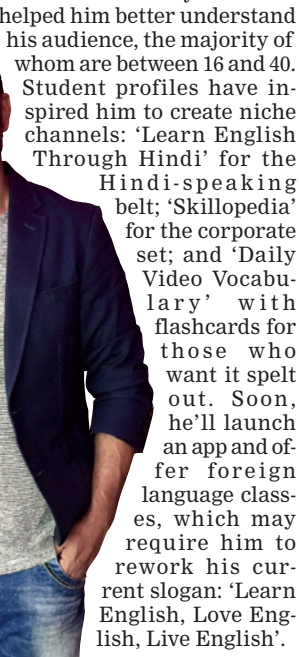
What Doesn't

> Their syntax and pronunciation is occasionally flawed, and exaggerated with Western accents, while such exclamations as 'Whoop-de-doo' sound contrived

iliary verbs 'should', 'could' and 'would', to knowing which conversation fillers will keep you afloat. He's posted 900 videos in three years and has 12 lakh subscribers, half of whom are outside India, says Kadam. This electronics engineer started out in 2005 with a consultancy firm that trained BPO employees in spoken English and soft skills. He founded Let's Talk in 2013, with 40 training centres across the country, paid online courses, and free You-



Tube tutorials. The ads from the tutorials pay for their production, says Kadam, who shoots the videos himself. They're often entertaining, with their young female tutors employing role play, modulated voices, and lilting accents to teach viewers how to talk like a pro, even when they have to 'fake it to make it', as one of them advises. The tutors are women from varied backgrounds — one is a teacher, another an RJ, a third works at a BPO. "I want the learner to feel it's the girl next door teaching him. He needs to feel comfortable with the tutor. Had I employed an old-school teacher to do the job, I might have had to unschool her first," says Kadam. YouTube analytics have helped him better understand his audience, the majority of whom are between 16 and 40. Student profiles have inspired him to create niche channels: 'Learn English Through Hindi' for the Hindi-speaking belt; 'Skillopedia' for the corporate set; and 'Daily Video Vocabulary' with flashcards for those who want it spelt out. Soon, he'll launch an app and offer foreign language classes, which may require him to rework his current slogan: 'Learn English, Love English, Live English'.



MAKING LEARNING A SCIENCE

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As a student at Delhi Public School in Dhanbad, Roshni Mukherjee was always asking questions. Why are we learning calculus? How will Newton's laws of motion help me in the real world? Her desire to link textbook knowledge to the real world led her to start ExamFear in 2011. The channel has now close to 5,000 videos on physics, chemistry, math and biology for Classes 6 to 12. "Each time I sit down to record, I think as a stu-

dent, not a teacher. I explain how it applies to real life," Mukherjee explains. For example, in her 'introduction to electricity' video for Class 10 physics, Mukherjee shows images of various electrical appliances and says understanding electricity will help us under-

stand these appliances better.

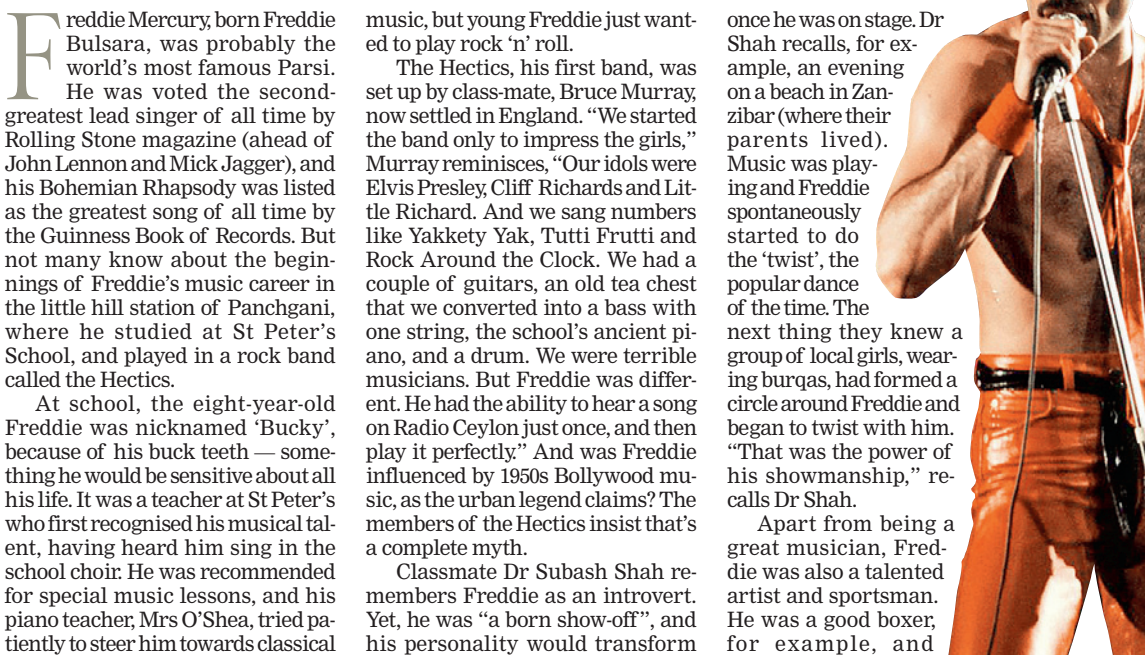
Mukherjee planned to become a teacher after completing a PhD but ended up with a job at Wipro during campus placement. She worked there for six years, but kept dreaming of teaching. In 2011, she began uploading free videos of science lessons. "I would work on my channel early in the morning before going to stand these appliances better. Mukherjee planned to become a teacher after completing a PhD but ended up with a job at Wipro during campus placement. She worked there for six years, but kept dreaming of teaching. In 2011, she began uploading free videos of science lessons. "I would work on my channel early in the morning before going to

The Panchgani boy who became a pop legend

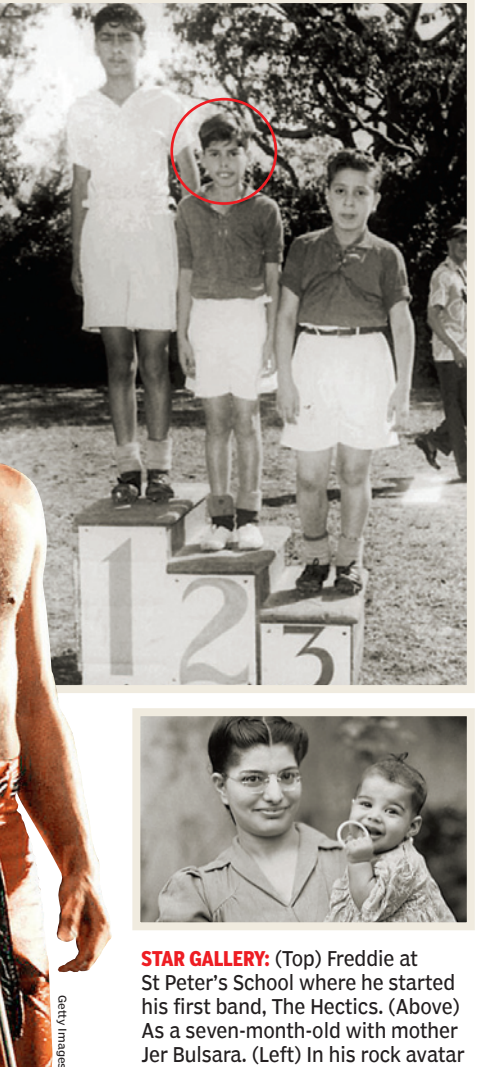
Tomorrow would have been Freddie Mercury's 70th birthday. His childhood buddies tell Anvar Alikhan how 'Bucky' could make even the girls in burqa dance

Freddie Mercury, born Freddie Bulsara, was probably the world's most famous Parsi. He was voted the second-greatest lead singer of all time by Rolling Stone magazine (ahead of John Lennon and Mick Jagger), and his Bohemian Rhapsody was listed as the greatest song of all time by the Guinness Book of Records. But not many know about the beginnings of Freddie's music career in the little hill station of Panchgani, where he studied at St Peter's School, and played in a rock band called the Hectics. At school, the eight-year-old Freddie was nicknamed 'Bucky', because of his buck teeth — something he would be sensitive about all his life. It was a teacher at St Peter's who first recognised his musical talent, having heard him sing in the school choir. He was recommended for special music lessons, and his piano teacher, Mrs O'Shea, tried patiently to steer him towards classical

music, but young Freddie just wanted to play rock 'n' roll. The Hectics, his first band, was set up by class-mate, Bruce Murray, now settled in England. "We started the band only to impress the girls," Murray reminisces. "Our idols were Elvis Presley, Cliff Richards and Little Richard. And we sang numbers like Yakkety Yak, Tutti Frutti and Rock Around the Clock. We had a couple of guitars, an old tea chest that we converted into a bass with one string, the school's ancient piano, and a drum. We were terrible musicians. But Freddie was different. He had the ability to hear a song on Radio Ceylon just once, and then play it perfectly." And was Freddie influenced by 1950s Bollywood music, as the urban legend claims? The members of the Hectics insist that's a complete myth. Classmate Dr Subash Shah remembers Freddie as an introvert. Yet, he was "a born show-off", and his personality would transform



once he was on stage. Dr Shah recalls, for example, an evening on a beach in Zanzibar (where their parents lived). Music was playing and Freddie spontaneously started to do the 'twist', the popular dance of the time. The next thing they knew a group of local girls, wearing burqas, had formed a circle around Freddie and began to twist with him. "That was the power of his showmanship," recalls Dr Shah. Apart from being a great musician, Freddie was also a talented artist and sportsman. He was a good boxer, for example, and



STAR GALLERY: (Top) Freddie at St Peter's School where he started his first band, The Hectics. (Above) As a seven-month-old with mother Jer Bulsara. (Left) In his rock avatar

EXAMFEAR

Founder:
Roshni Mukherjee | 30

Subscribers: **1.5 lakh**

Channel views: **5 crore**

No. of videos: **4,864**

What Works

> Tips on solving exam questions at the end of each video

> Use of animation to explain scientific concepts

What Doesn't

> Lack of links to additional reading material

> Only caters to science subjects

work. In 2014, I finally quit my job and took up online instruction full-time." Mukherjee generates revenue from advertisements and voluntary contributions from students and their families. "I introduced the contributions section on the channel because I needed money to sustain this model," she says. Lessons follow the NCERT syllabus, and Mukherjee plans to translate the videos into regional languages and possibly include non-science subjects. And she says she'll always keep the lessons free. "The satisfaction I get from helping students is very special to me," she says.

GO-TO FOR BABUS

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It all began in 2010, when Gaurav Munjal made a simple video to help his friends master computer science at college. "When our plans to study together didn't work out, I recorded some videos, explaining concepts on a white board. I uploaded these on YouTube and sent the link to my friends," says Munjal, now 25, and co-founder of Unacademy. "My friends started sharing the links, and I got thousands of

THE TRASH-TALKING TEACHER

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After acquiring an engineering degree at IIT-Kanpur, Arvind Gupta joined Tata Motors in Pune but he couldn't let go of his dream of teaching science. In college in the 1970s, he and his friends had coached the children of mess workers to help them get through their exams. "I used matchsticks and rubber tubing to make toys and explain scientific and mathematical concepts to children," he says. Now, his toys from trash videos number 7,500 and have been dubbed into 20 languages, including Russian. All this is done in a small 450sqft facility at the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics in Pune, from where Gupta retired four years ago as a science educator. "It is

exhilarating to see how many children watch these videos to understand subjects that are taught by rote in schools. Children can conduct different experiments as well as see how the concepts can be applied to real life," he says. The team recently shared the videos with a woman from China who wanted to translate them. "The videos are available in China now," he says. But they're facing challenges in dubbing the videos into Nepali and Odia.



ARVIND GUPTA

Founder:
Arvind Gupta | 63

Subscribers: **1,12,000**

Channel views: **4.9 crore**

No. of videos: **7,565**

What Works

> Materials used are easily available at home. Videos are available in English, Hindi, Punjabi, Kannada and Bengali

What Doesn't

> The scientific principles used in making toys are not always clearly explained. The viewer is expected to have a working knowledge of science

"Poorer regions need such videos to educate children and we are trying to do this," he says. Besides the videos, Gupta's website has more than 6,000 free e-books. "It shows how hungry people are for knowledge," he says.

ers that keeps him going. "More than 25 people called to tell us they'd cleared the UPSC exam this year. Many return to the platform as teachers," he says. "More than anyone else, my parents are happy," says Munjal, remembering how disappointed they were when he left his job at a software firm "that was fetching me a handsome salary" after a year to make free videos. "But I've always followed an unconventional path. Look at what Roman's parents had to go through — the guy could have been a doctor, then a top bureaucrat. But he followed his heart's calling — and that's what we want everyone to do," he says.

UNACADEMY

Founder:
Gaurav Munjal | 25

Subscribers: **2.8 lakh**

Channel views: **1.9 crore**

No. of videos: **729**

What Works

> Eight- to 10-minute videos on a variety of subjects

> Subjects are simplified with diagrams and visuals

What Doesn't

> Videos are not listed subject-wise

> Teachers spend too much time introducing themselves, which is redundant as a detailed bio is alongside



FROM A FORCED SMOOCH TO SINDOOR STUNT: 3 things you didn't know about Rekha

In a new book, author Yasser Usman shows a new side of the Bollywood diva

The shooting of Anjana Safar was underway in Bombay's Mahboob Studio. Raja Nawathe was the director and cinematographer of the film. In the very first schedule of the film, Kuljeet Pal (the director), Raja and Biswajeet (the lead actor) had hatched a plan, with Rekha as the unsuspecting victim. That day a romantic scene was to be filmed between Rekha and Biswajeet. Every last detail of the strategy had been decided before the shoot. As soon as the director Raj Nawathe said 'action', Biswajeet took Rekha in his arms and pressed his lips on hers. Rekha was stunned. This kiss had never been mentioned to her: The camera kept rolling; neither was the director ordering 'cut' nor was Biswajeet letting go of her. For all of five minutes, Biswajeet kept kissing Rekha. Unit members were whistling and cheering. Her eyes were tightly shut but they were full of tears.

Recalling the day, Biswajeet referred to the incident as Raja Nawathe's idea. Raja had insisted that he kiss Rekha, not yet fifteen, catching her by surprise. Biswajeet maintained that it was not his fault, that he was merely working on the director's instructions. "It was not for my enjoyment, but important for the film. Rekha felt betrayed and was furious," admitted Biswajeet.

Chappals for the new bride

After getting married in Calcutta, Vinod and Rekha returned to Bombay, and drove straight to Nibbana from the airport. But a storm was waiting to assail them there. Here's what happened that day at the Mehra residence according to a film-maker: As soon as the new bride bent to touch her mother-in-law's feet, Kamla Mehra angrily pushed her away. She refused to let Rekha enter her house. She lost her cool and abused and humiliated Rekha, who was standing at the front door: Vinod tried to intervene but Kamla was livid, so angry that at one point she took off her chappal and almost beat up Rekha with it. The poor girl was numb and confused. A crowd started to gather around the flat, and Rekha, stunned, hurt and shook up, started to run towards the lift, her eyes burning with tears. Vinod followed and told her to stay at her house till his mother calmed down.

Drama at Rishi-Neetu shaadi

22 January, 1980. The occasion was Rishi Kapoor and Neetu Singh's wedding. Neetu was a close friend of Rekha's. The whole of R K Studio was grandly bedecked. The biggest names of the industry were in attendance, including Amitabh Bachchan, his wife, Jaya, and his parents. The party was in full flow. Amitabh was talking to Mammoohan Desai in a corner and Jaya was sitting with her mother-in-law, Teji Bachchan, when Rekha made a sensational entry. Dressed in a magnificent white sari, Rekha had a bright red bindi on her forehead. But



TINSEL TALES: Before Rekha's Bollywood debut, she modelled for ads to earn extra money. This Gold Spot ad was shot by Shyam Benegal. (Below) Director Yash Chopra feared a clash between Jaya and Rekha during the Silsila shoot

what caught everyone's eye was the generous dabbing of sindoor in her hair. The cameras instantly pivoted away from Rishi Kapoor and Neetu Singh, and frenetically photographed Rekha's curious new look. The dull drone of everyone murmuring and whispering filled the evening air; everyone wanted to know: had Rekha married?

According to the Cine Blitz report, after congratulating Rishi and Neetu, Rekha went and stood bang in the middle of R K Studio's garden. When had she ever shied away from attention, or controversy? But her eyes kept darting towards Amitabh every other second. Gathering courage, Rekha took hold of her close friend Snehlata Pandey, the doctor who is credited with introducing Rekha to aerobics and better diets, and went over to where Amitabh was standing. All eyes, quite naturally, followed her. They were seen chatting formally for a few minutes. According to a report in Stardust, 'Jaya tried to keep a stoic front for a long time, but eventually she had to bend her head and let the tears roll down.'

A few moments later, Rekha exited the party, leaving behind a trail of unanswered questions. In a somewhat anticlimactic interview, Rekha later cleared the air: that evening, she had come to the reception straight from a shoot. The sindoor and mangalsutra she was wearing were part of her get-up for a film, which she had forgotten to remove. But according to a report published in Movie in June 1982, at a National Awards function, Rekha, who was being honoured with the award for best actress for Umrao Jaan (1981), was asked by then president Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, 'Why do you have sindoor in your maang?' Rekha promptly replied into the mike, 'In the city I come from, it's fashionable to wear sindoor.'

Edited excerpts from Rekha: The Untold Story with permission from Juggernaut Books



St Peter's School has today become a pilgrimage centre for fans, and it patiently puts up with trespassers in quest of souvenirs

school-mates recall the time he was getting hammered in a boxing match, and everybody told him to concede, but Freddie insisted on boxing till the finish, his protruding front teeth badly bloodied. Some friends remember him as "a bit of a sissy", though, and his favourite teacher, Mrs Smith, always thought he was slightly effeminate. Friends also recall his rather outré habit of calling the other boys "darling", a lifelong habit. Freddie himself apparently never realized he was gay till he was in his 30s, when he confessed to Mary Austin, his long-time girl-friend, that he might be bi-sexual. "No Freddie," she told him, "You're not bi-sexual, you're gay." It was a turning point in his life. Mary Austin recalled, "Once Freddie understood he was gay, he became one with himself, for the first time."

In the mid-'60s, he migrated to England with his parents, and reinvented himself, changing his name to Freddie Mercury, after his ruling planet. As a result, many of his school friends never knew, until after his death, that the great Freddie Mercury was actually their old Panchgani buddy. The only school friend who kept in touch with Freddie after he'd become famous was Bruce Murray, who remembers the time, for example, when Freddie invited him for dinner, and it turned out that the other guest was Elton John. But, while Freddie was always friendly, after a point Murray felt he could no longer keep up with him socially, and the friendship waned. St Peter's School has today become a pilgrimage centre for Freddie fans from all over the world, and it patiently puts up with trespassers, and vandals in quest of souvenirs. An enterprising alumnus even promoted a 'Freddie Mercury Tour of India', the highlight of which was a visit to the school and a photograph taken with Freddie's old Moutrix piano. But what became of Freddie's other Hectics band mates? The drummer, Victory Rana, went on to a distinguished military career, ending up as a major-general. Lead guitarist Bruce Murray migrated to England and, now runs a music shop. Guitarist Derrick Branche also migrated to England and became an actor, playing small roles in productions like My Beautiful Launderette and Jewel in the Crown. Bass guitarist Farang Irani ran a little restaurant in Pune, until he died a few years ago. And Freddie, of course, became one of the great Gods of rock music.